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SUGGESTIONS TO FIELDMEN
FOR USING
MANAGEMENT GUIDES FOR ASC COUNTY OFFICES



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Commodity Stabilization Service
Washington, D. C.

SUGGESTIONS TO FIELDMEN FOR USING
MANAGEMENT GUIDES FOR ASC COUNTY OFFICES

What is a good manager? Are there certain essential principles and practices that good managers observe, or is the all-important element the personal qualities--of judgment, foresight, leadership, and energy--of the manager as an individual?

Anyone who works with a group of outstanding managers will find that there are a number of common practices which they tend to follow. For example, they know the programs, they plan ahead, they see that their employees are assigned definite responsibilities and understand their jobs, they follow up to make sure that things are done, they have a keen interest in management. At the same time, they will differ in many particulars in the way in which they run their offices. In all of them, the personal element will be a factor of major importance.

How can we bring about improvement in management?

In seeking to improve management, the best guide is the practices which good managers tend to follow. The Management Guides attempt to summarize many of these practices. In view of the fact that a considerable number of county office managers and State Office personnel participated in the development of the Guides, it is believed that they contain many ideas which can be of practical help in the task of managing ASC county offices.

Certainly, however, little if any improvement will come from merely handing county office managers a copy of the Management Guides. As old Isaac Walton said of another art, it is hardly possible "to make a man--that is none--to be an angler by a book". Nor will much improvement necessarily result from telling a manager how he should run his office. He may, in fact, even resent what he is told as implying criticism of his present performance, and therefore fail to apply it, no matter how sound it may be.

The use of discussion meetings

Considerable experience has accumulated in recent years, in both government and business, which suggest that the most effective way for us to approach the improvement of county office management is for the fieldman and a small group of managers to discuss, over a period of time, the problems which managers face, their observations as to what practices help them solve these problems, and how they can do a better job. The Management Guides can give them ideas, drawn from the experience of many county managers and others, but they are still essentially guides for discussion. There may be better ways of doing things than are suggested in the Guides and any particular idea contained in them may not be workable in certain specific situations.

The reason that a discussion approach is suggested is that the basic objective is to get county office managers to observe good management practices. Sometimes this means changing habits of action. It is not enough for a manager to know about a certain practice; he must be willing to use it. In order to reach this conviction, the manager must himself think actively about how

he can do a better job. As is suggested in the introduction to the Guides, he should participate in discussion of the problems of management of ASC county offices, exchange ideas with his fellow managers and the fieldman, turn them over in his mind, test them against his own experience as a manager, and, to the fullest extent possible, develop out of his own thinking the practices which will enable him to do a good job.

When this is done, new practices are not something the manager is told he must do but instead are something he himself believes are worth doing.

The responsibility of the fieldman

If we are to make good progress, the fieldman must give personal attention to the improvement of county office management, not for a few days or even a few months, but continuously. It must be a recognized, definite part of his daily job. He is responsible for developing good managers in his area.

There must also be individual follow-up by the fieldman. As he visits each office after a discussion meeting, he should review with the county office manager the subject discussed at the meeting. They should consider jointly the application of the subject to the operations of that particular office and work out cooperatively any changes in management practices which may be needed.

A number of suggestions for holding profitable discussions of county office management are outlined on the following pages. These suggestions are drawn from wide experience in conducting successful discussion meetings. The main thing to remember is that it is not hard to conduct good discussion meetings if a few essential points are kept in mind. If they are disregarded, however, the meetings are likely to be unsuccessful or not as valuable as they should be. The suggestions are not intended as hard and fast rules, and it will be profitable for the fieldmen to evaluate them from time to time in the light of their own experience in conducting discussion meetings.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS
ON COUNTY OFFICE MANAGEMENT

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
1. Objectives;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To enable county office managers, under the leadership of the fieldman, to discuss problems they face in managing ASC county offices. b. To stimulate the group to think about practices that make for efficient operation. c. To encourage the group to test these practices, including those suggested in the Management Guides, in the light of their own experience.
2. Arrange discussion meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Try to have about one meeting a month. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Meetings spread over a period of time are more effective than concentrated sessions for a short period. b. At each meeting after the first, agree on a definite date for the next meeting. c. The ideal situation is to have about six or seven managers at the meetings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) If the group is large, some of the managers will take little part in the discussion. This will, to that extent, defeat the purpose of the meeting. (2) A large meeting is harder to run. It is more likely to get off the subject or be distracted by private discussions. d. Limit discussion of management to not over two or three hours, with a short break in the middle. The remainder of the day can be used to discuss program or other matters.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
3. Check the meeting place.	<p>a. See that the meeting place is in order with respect to lighting, ventilation, seating, ash trays, and so on.</p> <p>(1) Poor ventilation, by making the group drowsy or restless, sometimes is the cause of an unsuccessful meeting.</p> <p>b. If possible, have a table, comfortable chairs, and a blackboard.</p> <p>c. Don't arrange the chairs like a schoolroom, that is, all facing the leader. The best plan is to sit around a table with the leader at the head.</p> <p>d. Have everything needed on hand so that you will not have to interrupt the meeting to go look for something.</p>
4. Encourage an informal, relaxed atmosphere.	<p>a. This will help stimulate good discussion.</p>
5. Point out at the beginning:	<p>a. That these are discussion meetings and that you want the group to say what they think.</p> <p>b. That differences of opinion are expected and welcome. (A good hot discussion will stimulate thought and action.)</p> <p>c. That everyone should take part.</p> <p>d. That it will be helpful if private conversations can be avoided as they would interfere with profitable discussion.</p>
6. At the first meeting:	<p>a. See that everyone knows each other. If the group is small, it may be a good plan to have each one take a minute or two to tell about his office and its work.</p>

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
6. At the first meeting: (Cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">b. Explain the purpose and character of the meetings. Explain what the Management Guides deal with and the purpose they are intended to serve.c. Then begin by asking the managers what are the principal management problems which they face. What does a manager need to think about in order to do a good job?<ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) These questions are almost certain to arouse keen interest and get the meetings off to a good start, <u>provided the fieldman limits his participation to asking questions.</u>d. List the problems on the blackboard as they are brought up.e. If, after discussion, any of the sections in the Management Guides have not been listed, ask if these should be added.f. Ask what problem the group would like to take up at the next meeting.g. Suggest that they read the applicable section of the Management Guides before the next meeting.
7. Plan each meeting after the first.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The most common cause of failure of discussion meetings is lack of preparation by the leader.<ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) An experienced discussion leader plans carefully. An inexperienced leader is apt to think he can get by with extemporaneous inspiration, but he can't.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
7. Plan each meeting after the first. (Cont.)	<p>b. Prepare half a dozen or more thought-provoking questions on the subject to be taken up at the meeting. A sample set of such questions is attached to these suggestions.</p> <p>(1) The first question should be: What problem or aspect of this subject causes you the most difficulty? This is a good interest getter.</p> <p>(2) A good follow-up question is: What other problems cause difficulty?</p> <p>c. Before the meeting review carefully the section of the Management Guides relating to the subject to be discussed.</p> <p>d. Have a plan in mind for making the discussion fruitful, but be flexible and adapt the plan to the progress of the meeting. For example, it may be better to cover thoroughly a matter in which the group is interested than to insist on pushing along to cover all the questions you have drawn up.</p>
8. The job of the discussion leader:	<p>a. To stimulate thoughtful discussion. This can be done through:</p> <p>(1) Discussion questions.</p> <p>(2) Follow-up questions, intended to stimulate further thought or to turn attention to another aspect of the subject under discussion.</p> <p>(a) Follow-up questions must be phrased as the discussion proceeds and must be carefully timed.</p> <p>(b) The discussion leader has to keep on his toes to throw in the right question at the right point of the discussion.</p>

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
8. The job of the discussion leader: (Cont.)	<p>(c) Again and again the best follow-up question is "Why?"</p> <p>(d) Don't ask leading questions.</p> <p>b. To see that the discussion does not wander aimlessly, but moves along to some meaningful conclusion so that the group feels that it is making progress.</p> <p>(1) If the group reaches a common conclusion--for example, as to the best way to handle a certain problem--the members are more likely than they would otherwise be to improve their methods of dealing with that problem.</p> <p>(2) This does not mean that the group must agree on any given matter. On the contrary, difference of opinion is stimulating, helps to bring out important considerations and new ideas, and makes for sounder conclusions.</p> <p>c. The leader's job is <u>not</u> to give a talk to the group or try to sell his own ideas.</p> <p>(1) This would tend to kill the interest of the group and defeat the purpose of the meeting.</p>
9. Let the group do the talking.	<p>a. One of the hardest but most necessary things to learn in leading discussions is to restrain your own impulse to talk. That is why persons with experience as public speakers have a hard time learning to lead discussions successfully.</p> <p>b. Aim at talking <u>not over</u> 15 to 20 percent of the time.</p> <p>c. If you say something every time a member of the group speaks, you are talking more than twice as much as you should.</p>

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
9. Let the group do the talking. (Cont.)	<p>d. Restrict your remarks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) A brief introduction of about two (not ten) minutes, indicating the scope of the subject under discussion. (2) Feeding in questions to help stimulate and move the discussion along. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) State a question clearly and then <u>stop talking</u>. Wait for someone to comment. The group may need a minute to think. (3) Summarizing the discussion from time to time. <p>e. Encourage cross discussion among the group members. Don't require that each member address his remarks to you.</p> <p>f. Since you must limit your speech, try to make every word count.</p>
10. Guide the discussion.	<p>a. See that it stays on the subject.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) If someone gets off the subject, you can say something like: "That is certainly worth thinking about and perhaps we can get into it a little later, but let's stick with the problem we started to discuss." (2) If someone makes a remark that seems off the subject, try to see if it does have some bearing on the point under discussion. The speaker may not have made clear the connection he has in mind. (3) If a point is brought up prematurely, you can say, "I'm going to make a note of that. Let's reserve it for a little later, when we reach that subject." <p>b. If someone makes an impractical suggestion, turn it back to the group, rather than trying to refute it. Say "What do the rest of you think of the idea?"</p>

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
10. Guide the discussion. (Cont.)	<p>c. Summarize occasionally, perhaps two or three times in an hour.</p> <p>(1) Sum up briefly "the sense of the meeting," that is, the thinking of the group on the matters under discussion and the main conclusions reached, or points on which the group is in general agreement.</p> <p>(2) If there has been disagreement, sum up the points made on both sides.</p>
11. Encourage participation.	<p>a. Encourage all to take part in the discussion.</p> <p>(1) Try to get members who are untalkative to take part. Sometimes you can get other members of the group to help draw such a person out. It is important that all participate.</p> <p>(2) However, be careful about calling on anyone directly. To do so may tend to kill discussion and may cause some resentment if the person called on isn't ready to comment.</p> <p>(3) Don't go around the table asking each in turn to comment. This also tends to kill discussion.</p> <p>b. Draw on the experience of each member of the group.</p> <p>c. In fairness to the other members of the group, see that no one dominates or monopolizes the discussion.</p> <p>d. Don't permit private conversation, as it is impossible for the group to proceed effectively while such conversations are going on.</p> <p>e. Try to have all members of the group feel a responsibility for the conduct of the group and the success of the discussion.</p>

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
12. Don't take sides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Your job is to stimulate discussion, not to decide who is right. b. It is important not to let the group know whether you think that what anyone says is right or wrong. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) If you take sides, discussion will be restrained and much of the value of the meeting will be lost. (2) Watch your expression and tone of voice-- a look or tone of doubt or raised eye-brows may give you away without your realizing it. c. Guard against taking sides unconsciously, for example, by ruling that an idea you don't agree with is off the subject.
13. Base discussion on experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To the extent possible, get the group to base their discussion on actual experience rather than merely on opinion. b. Sometimes it may be possible to ask one or two members of the group to try out an idea-- for example, the use of a follow-up file or improvement of office layout--and report the results to the group at the next meeting. c. Encourage members of the group to discuss management matters with businessmen or others. It might be worth while occasionally to invite someone, such as a banker or a local manager of some national business organization, to discuss a common management problem with the group. d. Encourage each member to read at least one book on management. A good book usually reflects the experience of many people. The group might like to buy a book, such as <u>Supervision in Business and Industry</u> by Loken and Strong, and circulate it among the members.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
14. Use the Management Guides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The Management Guides reflect the experience of many county office managers and others. b. Probably the best plan is to conduct the discussion for the first half of the period without referring to the Management Guides. In other words, let the group bring out the problems and their own ideas as to how to handle them. c. Then go through the applicable section of the Management Guides and let the group discuss any points not already covered and whether or not they are sound or applicable to the offices represented.
15. Use the blackboard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A blackboard can be very helpful for listing the principal points brought out, advantages and disadvantages, and so on. b. Stand at the side when writing so the group can see. c. Don't face the blackboard when talking. d. If a blackboard is not available, a couple of large sheets of wrapping paper can be fastened on the wall. Use a drawing pencil or crayon.
16. Respect the feelings of the members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Don't state a question in such a way that it is in reality a criticism. b. Don't make fun of a member of the group. c. If a member makes a remark that is irrelevant or of dubious wisdom or if you have to restrain him from monopolizing the discussion, be considerate and tactful. d. Don't try to convert a member to the point of view of the majority.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING DISCUSSION MEETINGS

WHAT TO KNOW OR DO (Steps)	WHAT IS INVOLVED (Items)
16. Respect the feelings of the members. (Cont.)	e. For a discussion group to achieve maximum success, every member must feel that he is truly a member of the group, that his contributions are wanted, and that nothing he says will be held against him by the fieldman.
17. Be willing to learn.	a. A person who feels, even somewhat unconsciously, that he knows more than the group and that the discussion is a waste of time is bound to fail as a discussion leader. The group will quickly sense any pretense of superiority.
	b. The leader, to be successful, must be willing to admit to himself that he doesn't know all the answers and that he will learn as much at each meeting as the other members of the group.
18. Follow up.	a. After each meeting, as you visit the county offices, review with the office manager the subject discussed at the meeting.
	b. Consider the application of the subject to the operation of the office.
	c. Work out jointly with the manager any changes in management practices that may be needed--in other words, a plan for improvement.
	d. Put this plan in writing, on one page or less.
	e. Try to set a time when action will be taken on each change.

COUNTY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

1. What problem causes the most difficulty in connection with county committee meetings?
2. What other problems cause difficulty?
3. How can each of these problems best be dealt with?
4. When and how long should meetings be held?
5. What things particularly need to be kept in mind in planning for committee meetings?
6. How do you managers go about getting ready for a committee meeting?
7. Should an agenda be mailed to the committee members in advance?
8. Should the manager go over the agenda with the chairman in advance of the meeting?
9. What should the manager do while the meeting is being held--that is, what is the best way for him to go about assisting the committee?
10. Of the things the manager can do something about, what do you think helps most to insure a good committee meeting?
11. What problems are encountered in connection with minutes? How can these problems best be dealt with?

COUNTY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

DATE 11-22-55

COUNTY Brown

Plans for Improvement	Schedule	Action Taken by Manager
1. Will review work plans for coming month with the committee at last meeting each month.	Beginning with meeting 11-28-55.	Continuing
2. Will prepare agenda.	Beginning with next meeting.	Continuing
3. Will prepare minutes in somewhat greater detail to show clearly what subjects were discussed and what action was taken.	Beginning with next meeting.	Continuing
4. Will have partition built to shut off area where committee meets.	Before 1-1-56	Completed 12-21-55

INFORMING FARMERS ABOUT ASC PROGRAMS

COUNTY Brown

DATE 11-22-55

Plans for Improvement	Schedule	Action Taken by Manager
1. Will talk with editor, about getting more information to farmers.	Next week.	Talked with editor 12-1-55. Call him when something comes up. Editor plans to run series of articles on ASC programs.
2. Will talk with county agent and other agricultural agencies about possibility of a special agricultural edition of newspaper once a year.	Before 1-1-56	Discussed with agricultural agencies 12-15-55. County agent will discuss with editor.
3. Will discuss possibility of each member of county committee holding evening meetings with community committees to give better understanding of programs.	Next meeting	Discussed with committee 12-5-55. Chairman will try out one meeting early in January to see how it works.
4. Will try to prepare leaflet on ACP program to use in sign-up and to have available on counter.	By 1-15-56	Completed 1-24-56

1-17-56

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L/A plan need not be prepared for the first two subjects.





